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ABSTRACT

Under continued oppression, Haitian blacks have kept alive the memory of Africa, which pervades the most diverse aspects of popular culture. An understanding of this is the first step toward understanding the mythological structure of Haitian Voodoo. Analysis of the Haitian language, the peasant family housing, and the vocabulary of the Haitian religion demonstrates that the semantic base of Voodoo is rooted in an experiential totality which forms the background of Haitian thought. (Author/WP)

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Africa, the Motherland, in the Haitian Collective Memory

A Study of African Religious Continuity Among the Haitians

by

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Africa, the Motherland, in the Haitian Collective Memory

Guerin C. Montilus

The Haitian masses, those of the countryside as well as city proletarians, descendents of the period of colonial oppression (1492-1804), have never lost memory of their motherland, Africa, for even after the war of independence (1804) in which mulattoes, free blacks and slaves fought side by side, the social, political and economic structures continued to benefit only a handful of men who constituted the dominant class. During the colonial epoch, this class included the European settlers, a few of their freedmen, mulattoes (descendents of the Europeans) and free blacks, who monopolized economic and political power to the detriment of the servile peasant and prolitarian masses.[1]

Under this continued oppression, Haitian blacks kept alive an almost perpetual nostalgia for the homeland.[2] The memory of Africa pervades the most diverse aspects of popular culture. Some ways of thinking have endured, others have been created in response to particular historical circumstances; but Africa thrives everywhere. An analysis of this fundamental fact is the first step towards understanding the mythological structure of Haitian Voodoo.

Our study will consist of the following three factors:

I. Language

A. The people's designation of two types of Haitian blacks;

B. Mythical return to the original homeland;

C. Survival of the names of the two brother kingdoms of Dahomey: Arada and Danhomin.

II. Peasant family housing.

III. Vocabulary of Haitian religion.

Discussion of the above factors will show that the semantic base of Haitian mythology (Voodoo) is rooted in an experiential totality [3] which forms the background of Haitian thought and the imagination of the Haitian masses.

I. Language

By language we mean simply a manner of expressing oneself which reveals a way of thinking. We will not carry out an exhaustive study of the Haitian language to uncover all those expressions of collective memory of the homeland. We will reconsider only three linguistic factors sufficiently significant to indicate the characteristics of several lwa (spirits) of the Haitian (Voodoo) pantheon.[4]

Two Types of Blacks

In moments of solitude, as a gesture of affirmation, a man of the people will strike his chest and say vigorously:

Moin minm neg Ginin!
Me black man from Guinea!

Thus, the speaker intends to specify his place of origin. The Guinea to which he refers is the coastal region of West Africa bathed by the gulf of the same name. The Coast of Slaves is situated in this gulf. This way of expressing affirmation of oneself as African has historical roots, for even though many regions of Africa have lost tides of their sons to Haiti, this Coastal region was an exceptional provider of slaves to St. Domingo. Throughout our research on the strength of Haitian cultural ties to the homeland, this expression demonstrates a perennial link with Africa in the collective memory. But what does this exclamation signify?

Guinea remained in the collective memory as the ideal homeland of brave men, men of character, men of their word, honor; men gifted with profound social and human virtues, men of organization, strong in combat, intrepid warriors. Discussing the character traits of colonized blacks, Milo Rigaud remarked concerning certain ethnic groups from the Gulf of Guinea still represented in St. Domingo:

> Certain blacks were captured more than others in terms of their origins.... Blacks from the Gold Coast were respected for their culture, but in general their proud character made their capture and transport very difficult. They required masters who could study them. The Ibo in particular necessitated heavy surveillance because they would resort to suicide at the slightest sorrow or unhappiness.... The Arada or Juda were feared for their bloody murderous character, but respect for their intelligence...." [5]

Thus, the expression "Neg Ginin," Black from Guinea refers to this group of Blacks whose reputation and valor were firmly established by the colonial period.

Further, we will find in the mythology of the Haitian lwa (spirit) these same character traits, especially among those of the lightening and thunder, who stir up war, or whose who could be classed among the lwa of fire. They are believed to be strong, courageous, intrepid. These traits even appear in the dances consecrated to the lwa who derive mythically from the vodun of the Gulf of Guinea. For example, the Ibo lwa, of whom we have already spoken, who are the vodun of that group, have the following dance:

> "The dance has a majestic tone. The dancers take two steps to the right and two steps to the left, curving their torsos forward slightly. The cadences symbolize the seriousness, grandeur and cynicism of the Ibo lwa in whose honor the dance is performed. The Ibo of the colony were well known for their serious character and pride. In their intransigence they preferred to commit suicide than to be maroons. Whites were afraid of them for these slaves preferred death to suffering." [6]

The Nago dance "is a warrior dance in honor of the lwa of the same name. A crashing drum rhythm accompanies this dance. The syncopation helps the body perform jerky, vibrating movements. The drum beats are veritable appeals to unity. The dance symbolizes man's energy, courage, and power in his struggle to dominate nature. Thus the dancers' movements always suggest a sense of power...." [7] The vigorous Mahi dance is another such warrior dance,

dedicated to Ogou Feray (the warrior lwa). The dancers' feet trace a circular pattern. With the "breaking of the drum," or breaks in the rhythm, the dancers leap into the air, twirling as Voodoo dancers do...."[8]

It is important to notice the conjunction of language with the significance of religious dance. Notice that the color of all these lwa is red, color of blood, bravery and war. Moreover, on the historical plane, one might remember that the kingdoms of the Gulf of Benin were the best structured of those along the coast, particularly Abomey. Men who came originally from this part of Africa, when sold as slaves in St. Domingo would become spokesmen for the other slaves. They generally gave leadership during the revolts and the war of independence. Toussaint Louverture rose in this manner, as we shall discuss later. Such men dominated the others.

In contrast to these men from the Gulf of Guinea with their reputation for valor, there was another group called Congo. A Haitian is insulted to be called a neg Congo, (a black from the Congo): this is an affront equivalent to racial treason. Where did these expressions originate?

The Congo, or the Bantu, had been under the influence of the Portuguese since the 15th Century, so that Congo culture had received a light veneer of Christianity even before the opening of the slave trade between Africa and America. The Bantu were, therefore, the most vulnerable

to Western influences.[9] Milo Rigaud points out:

> ....The Congo are considered excellent house servants, particularly the Franco-Congo who are "sought after because of their gentle nature."[10]

This character trait gave them the reputation of having resigned themselves to slavery, while the neg Ginin, blacks from Guinea, were said to be fighters in perpetual revolt against the situation imposed upon them. The way the Congo deported themselves seemed to undermine the people's solidarity. Finally, this image of the accomodating Congo has become associated with the country itself. No Haitian would want to identify with it.

The reputation of easy acculturation among the Congo has left its imprint on their lwa, rites and even their sacred drums. While the lwa Ginin lwa of Guinea are said to be strong but benevolent, the lwa Congo, are thought to be cruel and malevolent. The people have projected onto the Congo lwa the passivity or ineffectiveness of this group in the revolts.[11] These spirits, then, do not act in the interest of the group's happiness. They have been designated lwa of nature (Mudong, etc.), as opposed to lwa of culture, and are thought to live in the bush. The lwa of culture, on the other hand, whose benevolent representatives came from the Gulf of Guinea, share the homes of the people. The rites and ceremonies of these lwa groups are carried out in their respective places: bush/house. Different animals are sacrificed to each: to

the benevolent lwa one offers domesticated animals (cows, lambs, foul); for the malevolent Congo , one slays a dog, or as in the case of the Mudong lwa, a dog is presented to them and the possessed suck of the end of its ear.

In contrast with the bitter mythic character of the lwa Congo, their dances are all marked by gentleness, highly resembling Western dances. For the most part, the dancers move on their toes, arms resembling a cross, hips swinging softly. Expressing love, joy, good humor, these graceful dances are performed most beautifully by women. Later the Western feeling of the dances led to their adoption by the Haitian elite, who took pride in not practicing Voodoo, and rejected African values in favor of bourgeois, Westernized attitudes.

The sacred drums of the Congo were equally acculturated as the rites and dances. Drums associated with other lwa retained the original form from the Gulf of Guinea, primarily from Dahomey; but the Congo drum took a Western cylindrical shape, double skins, and a set of cross secting attachments similar to those of European drums.

The Congo compromise with slavery is, therefore, reflected in the Voodoo religion cult, its rites, myths and sacred drums. Reference to the Congo and to Neg of Guinea (blacks from Guinea) indicates the presence of the motherland in the people's memory and in the structure of the religion itself. This presence is manifested in the

dualism we have just analyzed:

Neg Ginin	Neg Congo
Black from Guinea	Black (African) from Congo

2. Transmigration of the Dead

The motherland is not only the home of the virtuous and the fallen, it is also the country to which one returns after death. Milo Rigaud points out a well-known fact of Haitian history;

> The Ibo , who believed in the transmigration of souls were not afraid to die. They would hang themselves in order to return to their country. The Mine , for the same reason would slash their throats or eat soil until death rescued them.

And Rigaud adds:

> It is still a widespread belief in Haiti that Africans return to "lan Ginin" (the Guinea coastal area of Africa) when they die.... When the old people felt they were about to die, they would get everything in order. Holding the little plates associated with prayers to the Marasa (twins), they would repeat an invocation which was followed by a special song; then they would disappear. [12]

According to folk tradition, nostalgic slaves used to draw a sailing ship on the ground, place their feet on the image, go to sleep and thereby, so they believed, return to their beloved motherland. Undoubtedly they did go home in their dreams, their longing was so strong. The people also believed that certain men were able to transport themselves at will to Guinea-Africa by a simple effort of concentration. There was, therefore, constant spiritual movement toward

Africa, the motherland. Curiously, we have found a similar traditon concerning death in the Kingdom of Abomey, a tradition known in Allada. When the King of Abomey dies, one says:

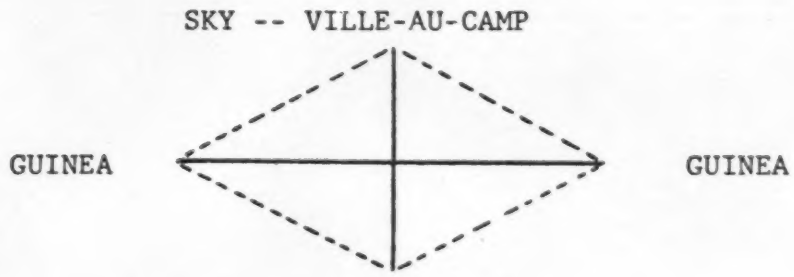
e yi Alada
He has gone to Allada

By extension this same transmigration is thought to apply when every Fon of the Abomey region dies. This pattern of return after death is identical with that of the slaves and the Haitian masses. Allada is sacred ground for the Fon. It is the village in Lower Dahomey where the Fon settled toward the end of the 16th Century, after the exodus of Tado. Here the people buried the remains of the elders from Tado and those of the ancestors who died in Adjahouto, the heroes, founders and leaders of the group. [12] In Allada, there is a little wooded area with a sacred temple where all the Abomey king's chiefs are buried. In any case, all the kings, including those of the brother kingdom, Porto-Novo, have their asen [13] next to those from Allada. It is believed that at the great ancestral ceremonies a cow is sacrificed to each group of asen and all the brother kings eat together.

It is possible, then, that the Haitian faith in transmigration of the dead to their homeland was an adaptation of the original African belief. The belief is applied to the lwa themselves, with the people imagining spirits on a mythic crossing, as J. B. Romain, Haitian ethnologist explains:

> Guinea symbolized black Africa in its totality.
>
> The spirits who live in Haiti come for the most part from Guinea. They travel back and forth between the underground waters, Ville-au-Camp and Guinea, moving at their convenience when no one needs their help on earth. lwa "Avrekete," well known in the north where there are few altars, was once called urgently into our presence. That day he arrived all out of breath (if one could judge from the behavior of the possessed), somewhat late. His first concern was to excuse himself for having been detained by a sick person in Guinea.[15]

The author gives this diagram of the myth:



This is the way the spirits (lwa) traveled according to the Haitians. The spirits lived in Guinea-Africa, especially those considered benevolent, powerful and capable of overcoming all misery. There is a ritual for calling the lwa of the ceremonies. During such ceremonies the spirits come and manifest themselves through possession of the follower(s). The spirits cross over to Haiti from Guinea underwater. This aspect of the belief is reminiscent of a Fon tradition according to which the vodun

(spirits) are believed to inhabit the waters (springs, streams, rivers). In the case of Haitians, Guinea-Africa was considered the ancestor's place of residence. The Fon also believed that the great vodun protectors of the extended family lived in the original homeland, a place founded by the head of the ancestor. Haitians have simply applied these beliefs to their situation as exiles. The following chant illustrates how the majority of the people interpret their uprooting from Africa and their transplanting in Haiti. It is a chant to twins, who are honored as lwa. The people pray to them to come from Guinea and take care of the Haitian exiles:

Marasa, elu! elu! elu!
Twins, despair! despair! despair! [16]

Nu pa gin manman, marasa, elu!
We haven't a mother, twins, despair.

Nu pa gin papa, marasa, elu!
We haven't a father, twins, despair!

Nu pa gin fanmi, marasa, elu!
We have no relatives, twins, despair!

Guinea, country of the ancestors, homeland, is also the country of happiness. For it is the land of the lwa. The following refrain repeats:

Nu di lwa, rele lwa Sao
We are speaking to lwa Sao

Ki kote u ye
Where are you?

Na Ginin sa bel
In Guinea it is beautiful.

Rele lwa Sao
Calling lwa Sao! [18]

Thus, one finds in many religious songs from Haiti the reference to Guinea as the homeland of the Haitian lwa, the land of earthly paradise. These spirits (lwa) moved back and forth between this paradise and Haiti, land of misfortune and despair; and so the people aspired to find happiness in the same paradise after death.

In this mythical Guinea, world of delight, there were two lands whose names have survived:

3. Rada and Danhonmin

The other two names for the motherland most frequently used by Haitians are Rada and Danhonmin. One finds Rada used in the following expressions:

a. Lwa Rada

b. Tanbu Rada (Rada drum)

Let us lood closer at the symbolic meaning of these two names in the context of Haitian religion and culture, and in relation to the significance of the motherland in the collective memory.

Rada is the diminutive of Arada, European designation for the Kingdom of Allada in what is now Lower Dahomey during the 17th and 18th centuries. It was a common practice to Europeanize African names. J. Lombard writes:

> Around 1650 the Kingdom of Ardres or Arda was described as a powerful and prosperous country. Rivet and Labouret referred to Spanish sources (documents), and after having proved that Ardres was indeed situated in the same place as Allada, alluded to a King named Tezifon....[19]

This name was known in St. Domingo during the colonial epoch. There were slaves who came from this kingdom. Milo Rigaud writes: "Arada women, eternal chatter-boxes, are rarely employed as domestics." And again, as we have already seen above: "The Arada or Juda are feared for their sanguine character and known for their intelligence." A. Metraux, ethnologist emeritus of Haitian Voodoo writes:

> Mereau de Saint-Mery, speaking of Voodoo in the last years of the 18th century, establishes the Africans of Arada (blacks from the coast of Dahomey) as the true believers in Voodoo, those who maintain the principles and the rules." [21]

Every Haitian knows that "Toussaint Louverture was the son of Gaou Guinou and the grandson of the King of the Arada ," as it is written in all Haitian history manuals. In Dahomey, I have conducted some inquiry into this historical fact.

At the royal court of Allada, it is known that a certain Gaou Deguenon, son of King Kopon of Allada, was given by his father to the King of France, who sent him to St. Domingo. Folk history emphasizes that this son was mischievous, boisterous, and upset the royal court. It is said, besides, that this Gaou Deguenon was Toussaint Louverture's father. Haitian history records that Toussaint's mother was also Arada. Gaou Deguenon's property still exists at Togudo. One can still see on the threshold l'Ayizanli, the spirit (vodun) guardian of the entrance. The royal family still offers sacrifices to

him. I was told that this son, along with his intelligent, cunning sister, the princess Ahuli Kponuwa, used to lead the royal court around on a leash! This is supposedly why the father wanted to separate them.

This explanation of what happened to Gaou Deguenon is quite clever. Beneath it, however, there exists an historical fact the royal family was reluctant to share. This Gaou Deguenon was to be the minister of the army for King Dechada of Allada. He was certainly acting minister when Agadja, the famous King of Abomey, seized his elder brother Kingdom, Allada in 1724, did away with King Dechada and put Midjo, son of Kpeda, in his place, thus rupturing the traditional dynasty. It is also known that Gaou Deguenon, minister of war, was brought to Abomey with several other members of the Allada court. Later they had to send these prisoners to St. Domingo, for they could not kill their brothers from Allada. (22) Thus Agadja took control of Allada, through which passed the route of slave convoys toward the port of Ouidah. He used Allada as a military camp from which to conquer Savi, on which Ouidah depended, in 1727. In this manner, he gained control of the slave business which was bringing considerable profit to both the Allada and Savi Kingdoms, control he had conveted for a long time.

Gaou Guinou, Toussaint Louverture's father, was this Gaou Deguenon. His name changed to Guinou as a result of phonetic and philological factors: the syllable de was

dropped by regressive derivation, a form of creative linguistics still practiced by the Fon . The following examples illustrate this pattern:

Vodun Fon		Orisha Yoruba [23]
Gu	derived from	Ogu
Legba	derived from	Elegba
Loko	derived from	Iroko [24]
etc.	derived from	etc.

This same practice continued in Haiti, so that one has:

1) Guinou derived from Deguenon
2) Lwa derived from Oluwa, etc.

Rada itself is derived from d'Arada, following the same principle.

Finally, to close this discussion of Gaou Deguenon, let us point out that the name of the thoroughfare that crosses Allada is Toussaint Louverture, Haitian hero, son of a prince of Allada. Therefore Rada has its historical origin precisely in the relations between the Gulf of Guinea and St. Domingo. As an expression, it came to stand for one of the three rites of Haitian religion (Voodoo):

1) the Congo rite, which we have already discussed;
2) the Petro rite, which includes several lwa (spirits) created in Haiti;
3) the Rada rite, on which we are going to focus now.

The term Rada is linked to three elements of Haitian Voodoo. One speaks of:

1) the Rada lwa (Rada spirits)
2) the tanbu Rada (Rada drums)
3) dans rada (Rada dances)

We want to discuss the religious significance of this name among the Haitians.

Lwa Rada (Spirits)

Haitians grouped under this category a number of supernatural beings who, they believed, came from Arada. These spirits are known for their gentleness. In fact, they are called lwa dus gentle spirits). In Creole, the epithet dus means sugary, So dus is the opposite of anme (bitter). On the basis of this paradigm of bitter/sweet opposition, the Haitians have classified the spirits they worship. The other two rites, Congo and Petro, include the lwa who are called sanginę, blood-thirsty (lwa Congo) and those called mishan, wicked (lwa Petro). This opposition may be shown in this way:

dus (sugary)	/	anme (bitter)
Lwa Rada Rada spirits	/	lwa Congo and lwa Petro (Congo and Petro Spirits)
Goodness	/	Evil
Benevolent	/	Malevolent
Life	/	Death

Of course, there are lwa ambiguous classification, belonging as much to one group as to the other. Gods of such exceptional mythological ambivalence are carriers of both the seeds of Life and Death, as are the Guede spirits, guardians of cemeteries and the portals of the land of the dead. Since these lwa are thought to come from Abomey (Capital of Danhonmin), they are included among the Rada group, from Allada.

The mythology we are about to discuss is based on the spirits (lwa) of the Rada rite. These spirits are rooted in the memory of Allada, the motherland of the very first slaves who came from Dahomey before Abomey took over the slave trade in 1724. We will return to the principle reasons why Allada gained religious preeminence in St. Domingo. For now, let us consider the other two elements of Rada culture.

b) Tambour rada (Rada drum)

The sacred orchestra of Haitian Voodoo includes three musical instruments:

1) the drum;
2) the ogan;
3) the tchatcha.

Traces of this tradition may be found in Allada, where the ritual orchestra is composed of two instruments:

1) the drum;
2) the Gan.

In the sacred orchestra of the Nesuxue vodun, royal spirits of Abomey, one may find the asan, the equivalent of the third instrument in Haitian orchestras. Let us examine closer how the very structure of the Haitian orchestra comes from Allada.

The drum is sacred in Haitian religion. It is believed that it houses a mysterious power, a spirit called Huto in Haiti. The same tradition exists in Dahomey and at Allada, where people believe that the drum is itself a vodun (spirit, god), not just the spirit's vessel:

hun-on, vodun we nyi
The drum is a vodun (spirit).

We are speaking here of consecrated drums; ordinary drums are not considered spirits. The Huto lwa drums of Haiti are related to the Allada tradition, in fact, the drummer is called the hunto, a term formed in this manner:

hun -- drum
xo -- to beat
to -- master

Haitians call the drummer the tanbuye. They attribute to the lwa who inhabits the sacred drum all the veneration that the Fon pay their hunto. In the Haitian case, the drummer's significance has been somewhat reduced; he is honored, but not worshipped as at Allada. Now one prostrates himself before the drum only, not before the tanbuye (drummer). Of course, the drummer's prestige is still quite strong; but he has lost his holiness, while that of the drum has grown, with rites governing its construction,

its consecration, usage, etc. The basic belief in the holiness of Allada has continued and become even more profound, as often happens when religions are transplanted.

The following are the Rada drums:

1) The asoto -- the largest Haitian drum.

It may be as large as 1.50 m high, .40 m in diameter at the top and bottom. This drum is rarely used nowadays, and never used for ordinary ceremonies. Formerly there was a ceremony held in its honor on New Year's Day.

At the beginning of my research in Allada, I was eager to know if the Haitian asoto was known in Dahomey. The elders said that they were indeed familiar with the big drum, but that it was used principally in the area of Abomey. The Haitian asoto is called sato in Dahomey. Here is a description of it given by da Cruz in Etudes Dahomeennes (Dahomean Studies):

> Sato (male): Cove:
> Large wooden drum of a yellowish color.
>
> Body of the instrument: a crude cylinder.
>
> Upper part covered with cowskin stretched around wooden pegs placed 15 cm. from the rim.
>
> Lower part deocrated with pierced motifs and broken lines. Body of the instrument varigated in blue, red, and white and ornamented with relief motifs: buffalo and the masculine sex.
>
> Dimensions:
> -- Total length _____ 167 cm
> -- Diameter of the skin _____ 38 cm
> __ Diameter of the base _____ 37 cm

Sato (female): Cove:
Same description as above.

Decor: ornamented with relief motifs of the feminine form and head.

Dimensions:
-- Total length _____ 153 cm
-- Diameter of the skin _____ 34 cm
-- Diameter of the base _____ 33 cm (25)

The male sato from Cove (forty kilometers from Abomey) corresponds closely to the Haitian asoto. In Haiti, the sexual distinction has been lost with this drum, but has been continued with other drums. The asoto is unique in this respect.

One must note that Haitians have remembered the rules specifying the construction of the sato drum and applied them in making the asoto and other Rada drums. All of them are carved from trunks of strong trees like the oak or mahogany, and then covered with cowhide. (Sheep skin is used for the Congo and the Petro.) In Haiti, the cow is thought to be benevolent, while the character of sheep is ambiguous. Beef is also the meat used in rituals to the Rada lwa. Wooden pegs placed ten centimeters or so from the rim distinguish the Rada drum from those of the Congo and Petro, which use a network of cords to create tension on the skin. Thus the Rada drums reflect their Dahomean origin in their very composition: choice of materials, tension system, etc. Let us consider now the second category of Rada drums.

2) The batri Rada (the Rada battery)

The Rada battery is composed of three drums of different sizes:

The biggest drum (the Manman) has the

a) following dimensions:

Length	1 m 00 (approx.)
Diameter of the skin	0 m 30 (approx.)
Diameter of the base	0 m 20 (approx.)

This Manman drum sets the tone, establishing an intense, free moving beat while the others provide a clear, rhythmic background. The Manman's voice calls out to the Rada lwa and makes these spirits "fall upon" their brides, the hunsi (the possessed).

b) Then there is the medium size drum, the segon (second), which has the following dimensions:

Length	60 to 80 cm.
Diameter of the skin	20 cm.
Diameter of the base	15 cm.

c) Finally, there is the smallest drum, the boula or pitit (little one):

Length	40 to 60 cm.
Diameter of the skin	15 cm.
Diameter of the base	12 cm.

As we have already pointed out, these three drums are constructed according to Dahomean traditions. In form, they are like those drums made among the Fon of the Allada region, cone shaped with open base. As for the tension system, it is the same as we have described above. Even the original decorative style of the drums has been retained by Haitians. "The Rada drums are generally

painted in bright colors that have symbolic meaning," according to Alfred Metraux.[26] Describing the Fon drums, Clement da Cruz writes: "The body of the drum, almost always monoxyle, is often decorated with engravings and sculptings of human subjects and geometric designs."[27]

Among the Fon in Allada, the Rada drum lore is being regenerated.

Haitians have instituted a minor modification in the composition of the Rada orchestra in that they use only one small drum among the three, while the Allada tradition required two small drums, a medium sized one and a large one:

-- a large drum called the hun daxo (principal drum);

-- a medium sized drum called the Kpeze;

-- two small drums called the alekle.

Such is the profound relationship between Haitian sacred Rada drums and their prototypes in Allada, the motherland.

The Haitian ogan is identical to the Fon gan. The function of this gong is to keep the rhythm and create, along with the secondary drums, a melodious background.

The tchatcha corresponds to the asan of Dahomey. In Haiti these instruments are made from cylindrical calabashes (crescentia cuyete). When one shakes these gourds, the dried seeds inside make a metalic sound. The asan of Dahomey is a cone-shaped basket rattle with a gourd base filled with little stones. As we have already shown,

the asan is part of the Nesuxue orchestra of Abomey, not the ritual orchestra of Allada. Nevertheless, it belongs to the Fon heritage. Here we have, then, an explication of the Haitian Rada drum. Now let us look at the Rada dances.

B) Danhonmin

The term Danhonmin us used in two popular expressions: Neg Danhonmin (black man from Dahomey) and lwa Danhonmin (spirits) from Dahomey . Neg Danhonmin resembles the idiom, Neg Ginin, which as we have already seen signifies the bravery and courage of the men of the region. However, we must point out that Allada, or Rada, has only religious significance in the Haitian language, while Danhonmin has a distinct social connotation.

Danhonmin is the ancient name of the Abomey kingdom, founded at the beginning of the 17th Century by a group of Sadonou from Tado. These people became very strong and were able to absorb the kingdom of Allada in 1724. As we have already seen, from Allada they were able to gain control of the slave trade at Ouidah, extending the kingdom approximately 240 km from north to south. From 1727, date of the conquest of Savi, to 1780, end of the slave trading period under King Kpengla, it was the great Danhonmin kingdom that provided slaves for St. Domingo.

Therefore, the designation lwa Danhonmin refers to the motherland, as the following chant to Ezili Freda Danhonmin, demonstrates:

Ezili o!

Piga nonmin non moin.
Take care in calling my name.

Ezili o!

Piga nonmin non moin.
Take care in calling my name.

Su u nonmin non moin.
If you call my name.

Mwe, Ezili Freda Danhonmin
Me, Ezili Freda from Dahomey.

Kanon va tire
The cannon will thunder.[28]

Here we have two key elements of our present analysis:

a) the precise reference to Danhonmin;

b) the warrior tone, which, we have already seen, characterizes the lwa of the Gulf of Guinea. These spirits, with the men of the region, led the slaves in their war for liberation and Haitian independence.

Danhonmin, Ginin, Rada, share the association of benevolence, according to Haitian mythology. Still one might ask why Arada transcended the others in liturgical development. We promised earlier to clarify this point.

First of all, the Allada kingdom exercised a certain political supremacy at the beginning of Dahomey's slave trading Allada's location towards the interior but not too far from the ocean gave it some advantages. In fact, the first slaves sent to St. Domingo came, for the most part, from this kingdom.

Secondly, we have to mention the spiritual prestige

of the king of Allada. He was guardian of the religious traditions and sacred artifacts of the Fon immigrants from Tado, and he eventually controlled all of lower Dahomey. J. Lombard comments on these two factors.

> The Spanish missionaries who went to Ardres to try to convert King Tezifon described the city as very large.... The King appeared very rich and very powerful.... Though these reports may be somewhat exaggerated, they, nevertheless, seem to have some basis in truth; we ourselves have seen the ruins of the walls of ancient palaces in the coffee plantations along the road to Sedje, and they enclose an area of impressive size.
>
> Bosman also refers to the great power of the King of Ardres. Dalzel alludes to it as well.
>
> Certainly the extent of the Allada kingdom was impressive. On the North, it was bordered by the Lama Valley, stretched south to the sea...., west to the Aheme lake and east all the way to Oueme.
>
> At Allada, where people were very discreet about the political power of the ancient king of Ardres, they told us that Adjahutonon was formerly sovereign of the chiefs of Niaouli, Dedome, Tori-Bosito, Hounli, Agon and those of the region of Godomey....
>
> He appointed all chiefs of villages. They had to come and give an account of their function. It was the same for the heads of lineage. His main function was to enthrone the Kings of Abomey and Porto Novo. This privilege, however, did not give him any sovereign rights over these younger brothers. It was rather a formal procedure required by family and religious tradition; a blessing from the ancestors through the family chief seated at Allada.

> Another reason for this spiritual significance was the presence of certain ancestral relics at Togudo...
>
> Finally, whenever the people of Porto Novo, Abomey or Allada overcame an important religious or political event, their kings were obliged to make a series of presents to the chief of the Adjahuto worship....
>
> The Adjahuto chief was surrounded by many voodoo priests, who acted as his counselors....
>
> This religious power extended to all the priests of the kingdom, including those from Agasu, the elder brother of the Adjahuto worship and a few priests from Porto-Novo, a status they no longer enjoyed after the conquest of Allada.
>
> All of the king's political power then was suppressed, and his spiritual role seriously reduced.[29]

Spiritual power, political role -- everything must have contributed to the image of Arada, which became Rada for those slaves who were brought from the motherland before 1724. One can understand, then, why the Voodoo priests and the initiates who were sold remained attached to the religious center of their native land. Their vodun came from Arada. And in St. Domingo, these Fon people who carried on the strongest resistance to European acculturation, proceeded to organize a new religious hegemony of the Rada faith. Their political dominance culminated in the government of Toussaint Louverture, descendent of the Fon people and first head of the Haitian state.

So we have seen how the Haitian language reflects the people's memory of their native land. The housing pattern of Haitian peasants represents another very important form through which the culture of the mother-land continues.

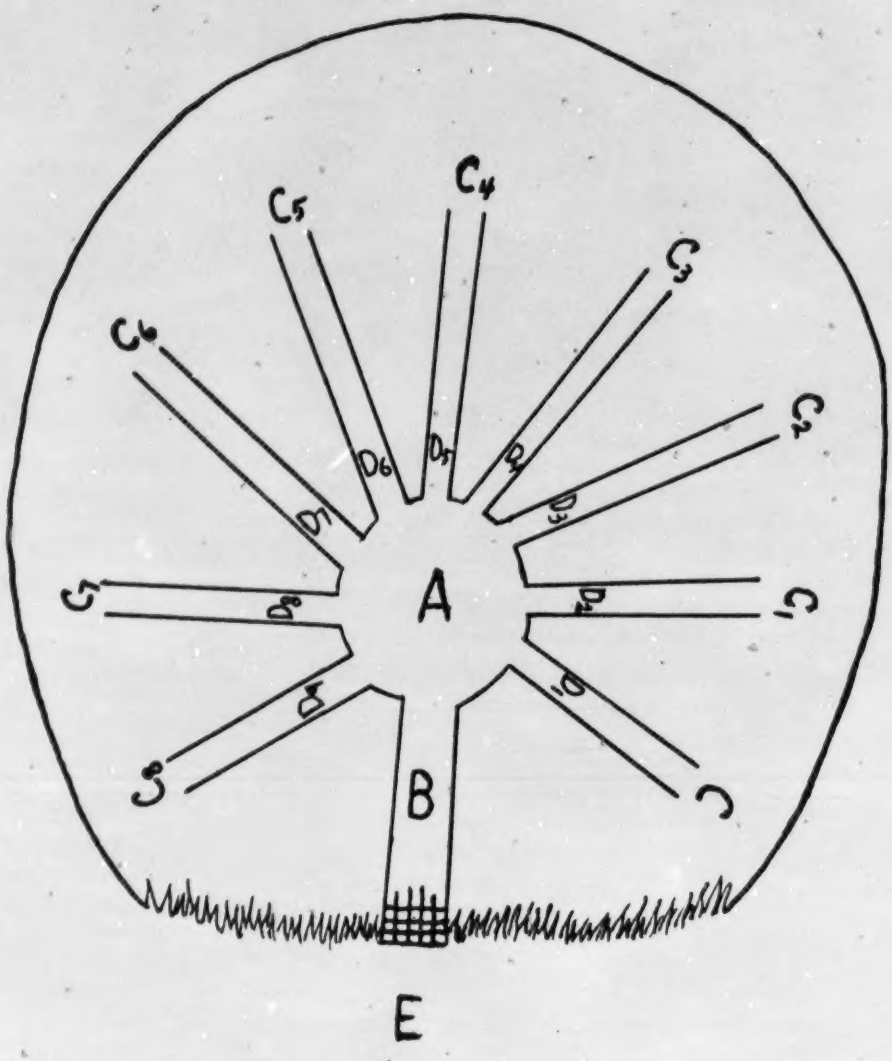
II. Peasant Family Housing

When Independence was proclaimed January 1, 1804, the slave masses became the peasant masses. These men and women had to occupy the land, discover ways to shape an environment on property that had been burned, almost totally devastated. They had to devise a new structure and a new communal organization. It is at this critical point that the image of the motherland resurges.

The people tried to reconstruct the African village. The young men, their wives and children gathered around the grandfather, who became chief of the family. This group constituted the family domain in a space called the laku or court. Here the whole family carried on its activities. J. B. Romain was presented a diagram of the type of court found at Gallifet and at Carrefour-des-Peres (north).[30] We have visited similar compounds in the course of our research in the north and south of Haiti -- at Pilate, La Colline, Demizaine, la Plaine des Cayes, Torbeck, etc. Here is a key to the diagram:

A. Temple of Hunfo.

B. Main walkway for entering or leaving the court.



E

DIAGRAM OF LAKU

C. Main house (belonging to the patriarch).

C1 to C8 -- Living quarters surrounding the hunfo.

D1 to D9 -- Paths covered with bushes.

E. Metsiyen tree barrier.

The people owned and worked the land in common. There one was born and ones umbilical cord was "planted" there in the sacred earth, one of the most important Haitian rituals. A coco-tree was planted to commemorate the birth. The fruit of the tree belonged to the person for whom it was planted; its growth symbolized the person's own development. On the same day of the planting, the child was committed to the protection of a family lwa called the lwa-rasin, which means "rooting spirit." In fact, this spirit had his temple in the middle of the communal property, so that this area seemed charged with a spirituality that protected the entire family. Through these spirits, everbody was united in the practice of the "service," an annual celebration coinciding with the end of the year rebirth festivities. The spirits became incarnate in their hunsi (wives of the spirit), and the dancing lasted several days.

Here one will recognize easily the spatial organization of the Fon family of Danhonmin and even Allada. Each extended family occupies the land chosen by its founding ancestor. The house is called the hue, and bears the name of the founding ancestor. There is a protective spirit

(vodun) for the Fon house just as for the Haitian court (laku). He is called Tohio: To means father, hio, to offer a sacrifice. One offers a sacrifice to the father spirit, for he is considered the progenitor of all the children born to the home. There are yearly festivals called huetanu ("ceremonies for the beginning of the year") in honor of this protective spirit. It is certain that the Haitian system followed this model.

The ancestors also live within this area for they have been buried there. The ancestral symbols (asen) are collected at a special place where the annual ceremonies are held to honor the "parted ones," and prayers are offered on behalf of the extended family. Haitians did not forget this practice, for within the court (laku) there is a little family cemetery whose white washed tombs reflect the sacredness of the place. On the second day of November, according to the Catholic church calendar (we will see later why this is so), the people commemorate the deceased in a ritual called manje-le-mo, meals of the dead, just before the big "service" to the spirits during Christmas and the following days.

Neither have the Haitians forgotten the kinship patterns and relationships that exist within the hue, the habitat of the extended family. Among the Fon, the family chief is called daa, father; the children are called vi. Father is papa and children, pitit (little ones) among Haitians. Affection permeates the atmosphere of the laku

as it does the climate of the Fon hue. The patriarch governed for the common good of the family in imitation of his prototype in Dahomey and many other areas of Africa.

Unfortunately, time has taken its toll on the laku as a Haitian institution. The notion of inheritance took hold in the countryside and brought dire consequences: successive partitioning and abuse of the soil. The laku was fragmented, the extended family was dispersed in all directions. Something did survive, however, The laku continues to exist in the hearts and spirits of the elders. The "service" to the lwa rasin, "rooting spirit" is still observed by family members who return to the old site and carry out the rituals according to the prescriptions of the most recently deceased ancestor. In its reduced form, the laku is often called "bitation." Referring to the notion of habitation, this term evokes the Fon hue. When a Haitian visits Dahomey, he is not at all surprised to find such organization of the family on the land, for the pattern has survived among us.

Another cultural element has also been retained: the influence of the Fon language on Haitian Creole, particularly the religious language.

III. Haitian Religious Vocabulary

The vocabulary of Haitian Voodoo is without doubt the most authentic reflection of Fon culture in Haiti. Fon expressions embellish Haitian liturgical language. The following are examples:

1) the names of principle spirits (vodun) thought to be of Dahomean origins. Sometimes the names are distorted, but at least the linguistic root has been conserved. Legba, Ogu, Ayizan, Loko are examples.

2) the names of cultural functions. Some of them have not survived; Haitians have created others. Nevertheless, some important names still exist:

a) Among the Fon, the hungan is the chief of the convent (hunkpame) and all the initiates and spouses (hunsi) of the spirits.
In Haiti, this term (hungan) has been used to designate the priest of the voodoo cult, though such a priest would be called the vodunnon among the Fon. This latter term was not retained in Haiti, probably because the term vodun, meaning a supernatural being, came to represent the religion itself. The masses kept the Yoruba expression oluwa, the slave's designation for "master" and, thus, a useful term within their social condition in St. Domingo. From the word oluwa, the the people derived the term lwa.

b) Badjigan
This term was also composed by regressive derivation from the Fon word agbadjigan. Agbaji means parlor; gan means chief. The agbadjigan was in charge of the reception

room of royal palaces, the homes of government ministers or other important persons. In Haiti, the badjigan is the Voodoo priest's assistant. As such, he serves as an intermediary between the priest (hungan) and the other members of the temple.

c) hunsi

This Fon term was maintained without any modification, neither phonetic nor semantic. In Fon, hun means supernatural being who oversees a section of the universe. It is the formal equivalent of vodun, the popular term. Si derives from asi, which signifies spouse in Fon. Thus, the hunsi is the person who has undergone initiation so that the vodun (spirit) may become visible through him. Vodunsi is a more popular usage. In Haiti, the hunsi is the spouse of the lwa, just as in Dahomey.

d) hungenikon

This term has been modified phonetically. In Fon, the hunjenukon is the leader of a group of persons who are being initiated as hunsi. He is the first to enter the convent or be "killed" by the spirit, as it is said in the ritual language. The hungenikon of Haiti leads the choir and other aspects

of the ceremonies, functions as a kind of acolyte for the hungan.

3) Sacred place, names and ritual objects

Some of these terms have survived in Haitian religion. For example:

a) hunfo -- comes from hunxo, Fon word for the vodun's hut, or the sacred temple. Xo means hut. The aspirate "h" has been changed to "f."

b) Ogan -- has already been discussed.

c) Pe -- comes from the Fon word Kpe, the mound consecrated to the vodun and the place where he lives. In Haiti, the pe is the name of the stone altar in the hunfo. On this altar, one places the sacred pitchers, the stones of the spirits, their belongings, and the implements of the hungan; the followers bring their offerings here.

d) Veve -- among the Fon, this word means "red" and is synonymous with vovo, a more frequently used word. Veve is corn meal that has been died in red oil (ami vovo) for use in various aspects of the liturgy, including tracing symbolic designs (the circle, for example) on the ground, a practice that Haitians have continued. In fact, corn meal, ashes, coffee grounds and powdered stone are all used

to draw symbols associated with the lwa.

e) govi -- means little (vi) gourd (go) in Fon. In Haiti, the govi is the pitcher into which the spirit (lwa) descends. It is the spirit vessel.

Many other Fon expressions have persisted in the religious vocabulary of Haiti. Having researched this subject, Suzanne and Jean Comhaire-Sylvain prepared a small glossary entitled African Continuities in the Religious Vocabulary of Haiti (Survivances africaines dans le vocabulaire religieux d'Haiti).[31] More important still is the Dahomean linguistic structure, which provides the Haitians the perceptual orientation and interpretation of the world. This syntax of meaning is especially visible in the lwa mythology of the Fon people, but it also pervades the gestures, rituals, expressions, songs, etc. This world view is not always explicitly manifested in words, but should it be? After all, is not the signified more important than that which signifies, the concept more important than the symbol? Different situations may lead to new modes of expression; but a people's psychological fabric itself never totally disappears despite the assaults and jolts of history. If one needs proof of this tenacity of culture, one finds it in the Haitians' memory of their motherland, Ginin, Danhonmin or Rada.

NOTES

[1]Much has been written on the problem of social classes in Haiti. The late Dr. Jean Price-Mars was particularly scathing of the Haitian elite in his book Ainsi Parla l'Oncle (Paris: Compiegne Press, 1928). See p. 107.

[2]The oppression of the Haitian masses has been continuous. Consider these parallels:

Before 1789	Between 1950 and 1960
a) Major white proprietors administrators, poor whites, shop owners and employees: 7%	a) Upper bourgeoisie: big businessmen, major landowners, higher administrators and staff: 1.5%
b) Mulattos, free or enfranchized men: 13%	b) Middle class: middle-level bureaucrats, employees, professionals and artisans: 11%
c) Black slaves: 80%	c) Industrial working class, landowning peasants, both of medium income and poor: 87%

See Gesner Roc, Haiti Tournant après Duvalier (Québec: Jean-Jacques Acaau, 1968), p. 74. The above represents the socio-economic context of Voodoo. See also Paul Moral, Le Paysan Haitian (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve and Larose, 1961).

[3]This totality is the sum of socio-economic frustrations that the peasant masses have suffered throughout Haiti's history, from 1502, when the first Blacks arrived as slaves, to the present.

[4]These linguistic factors are manifested in daily life.

[5]Milo Rigaud, La tradition voudoo et le voudoo haitien (Paris: Niclaus Editions, 1953), p. 46.

[6]Guérin Montilus, Les repas sacrificiels du vaudou haïtien, Master's thesis, Institute of Ethnology, University of Paris, Sorbonne, 1969, p. 98. See esp. Michel Lamartinière Honorat, Les danses folkloriques haïtiennes (Port-au-Prince: Publication du Bureau d'Ethnologie de la République d'Haiti, 1955, ser. 2, n. 11).

[7]Montilus, op. cit., p. 97.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Roger Bastide, Les Ameriques noires (Paris: Payot, 1967), p. 158.

[10]Rigaud, loc. cit.

[11]Popular judgement is somewhat exaggerated, for some of the well-known maroon chiefs were Congo, such as Lamour Derance, who, at nightime brought his bands down from the mountains to harass the settlers and put their plantations up for ransom.

[12]Rigaud, op. cit., p. 61.

[13]Assen: Metal object representing a deceased member of the family.

[14]Mythical city situated somewhere on a mountain in Northwest Haiti, near St. Louis-du-Nord according to some sources. Others say it is near Port-de-Paix. It is a kind of base for the lwa. See A. Metraux, Le vaudon haitien (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), p. 80 and J. B. Romain, Quelques moeurs et coutumes des paysans haitiens (Port-au-Prince, Haiti: Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1958), p. 212.

[15]Romain, op. cit., p. 165.

[16]Elu: an interjection derived from heelu, a Fon term meaning misfortune, alas! It is an expression of surprise or relief at the end of an exhausting effort. Vexation or condemnation may also be implied as in "Heelu i!" ("Shame on him!")

[17]Romain, op. cit., p. 146.

[18]Sao derives from Saho, feminine spirit from the Hula group of the Adja in the southwest of Dahomey. For more on Saho, see P. Verger, Notes sur le culte des Orisha and vodun (Dakar: Ifan, 1957), p. 541.

[19]Jacques Lonbard, "Contribution a l'histoire d'une ancienne societe politique du Dahomey: la royaute d'Allada," Bulletin de l'Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, IFAN, Vol. XXIX, no. BN 1-2, 1967, p. 48.

[20]Rigaud, op. cit., p. 46.

[21]Metraux, op. cit., p. 22.

[22]In the Abomey Kingdom, fraticide was forbidden.

[23]Orisha: Yoruba term for spiritual beings; comparable to the word vodun of the Adja and the Haitian expression lwa.

[24]Loko comes from the Yoruba term iroko. The Fon, by regressive derivation, changed the "r" to "l", since "r" does not exist in their language, Fongbe.

[25]Clement da Cruz, "Des instruments de musique dans le Bas-Dahomey," Etudes dahomeenes, IFAN Center, Porto Novo, Dahomey, Vol. XII, 1954, p. 25.

[26]Metraux, op. cit., p. 160.

[27]da Cruz, op. cit., p. 19.

[28]Romain, op. cit., p. 142.

[29]Lombard, op. cit., p. 51.

[30]See the diagram of Laku on the following page; Romain, op. cit., p. 222.

[31]Suzanne and Jean Comhaire-Sylvain, "Survivances africaines dans le vocabulaire religieux d'Haiti," Etudes dahomeennes, IFAN Center, Porto-Novo, Dahomey, Vol. XIV, 1955, p. 5-20.